

The definition of disability in the Social Security law is a strict one. To be eligible for benefits, a person must be unable to do any kind of substantial gainful work because of a physical or mental impairment (or a combination of impairments), which is expected either:

- to last at least 12 months, or
- to end in death.

If, because of a medical condition, a person cannot do the work that they performed in the past, then age, education, and past work experience must be considered in determining whether the person can do other work. If the evidence shows that the person can do other work, even if it involves different skills or pays less than their previous work, they cannot be considered disabled for Social Security purposes.

How to determine if you are disabled

You should be familiar with the process we use to determine if you are disabled. It's a step-by-step process involving five questions. They are:

1. Are you working? If you are and your earnings average more than \$780 a month, you

generally cannot be considered disabled.

2. Is your condition severe? Your impairments must interfere with basic work-related activities for your claim to be considered.

3. Is your condition found in the list of disabling impairments? We maintain a list of impairments for each of the major body systems that are so severe they automatically mean you are disabled. If your condition is not on the list, we have to decide if it is of equal severity to an impairment on the list. If it is, your claim is approved. If it is not, we go to the next step.

4. Can you do the work you did previously? If your condition is severe, but not at the same or equal severity as an impairment on the list, then we must determine if it interferes with your ability to do the work you did in the last 15 years. If it does not, your claim will be denied. If it does, your claim will be considered further.

5. Can you do any other type of work? If you cannot do the work you did in the last 15 years, we then look to see if you can do any other type of work. We consider your age, education, past work experience, and transferable skills, and we review the job demands of occupations as determined by the Department of Labor. If you cannot do any other kind of work, your claim will be approved. If you can, your claim will be denied.

You may obtain a copy of Disability Evaluation Under Social Security ("The Blue Book") which contains the medical criteria that SSA uses to determine disability. [Full](#)

[Publication](#)

(170 Pages)

[General Information](#)

(12 Pages)

[Adult Listing of Impairments](#)

(88 Pages)

[Childhood Listing of Impairments](#)

(69 Pages). It is intended primarily for physicians and other health professionals.